



## Existing Conditions in the Cedar Street Area

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### Executive Summary

This report presents existing conditions in the Cedar Street study area, also called the “Bellemeade” area, based on data analysis and two public meetings attended by about 60 residents, property owners and interested investors in the area. Recent rezoning applications and demolitions of historic structures indicate the intense planning and development pressures that the area faces and suggest a growing conflict between large property owners interested in dense multi-family or commercial development and single-family property owners interested in preserving the integrity and ambiance of the historic residential core. Contributing to this conflict is a number of factors:

- Decades of new development that has not respected the historic character of the area;
- Absentee landlords and land speculation that has led to poorly maintained properties and unruly tenants;
- Large tracts of vacant (mostly publicly owned) industrial land on the western fringe of the study area;
- Large expanses of unscreened parking on the eastern fringe of the study area that create “moats” disconnecting the neighborhood from downtown;
- Wide, high-speed thoroughfares that isolate the area, impede pedestrian access and discourage owner occupancy; and
- A lack of neighborhood “identity” and a coordinated neighborhood organization.

Despite these problems, citizens at both public meetings agreed that the area represents a strong opportunity for the City to stabilize and to enhance this northwestern border between downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods. Area assets include its strong historic character, particularly along Cedar Street, as well as an eclectic mix of commercial, office and industrial structures along the area’s edges. The eastern fringe of the study area, now anchored by First Horizon stadium, grows in its visibility and vitality, while the planned greenway (which will replace the rail line at the west of the neighborhood) and the proposed Bellemeade Village will stabilize the northeast and western sides of the area and present even more opportunities for connectivity to downtown.

To ensure that new development complements rather than weakens the area’s historic character, the City will utilize a planning process that addresses the needs and interests of both large property owners and single-family residents. City staff believes that a Strategic Area Planning process can meet the needs of these varied stakeholders, but will require attention to a finer grain of uses than the City normally assesses. A Strategic Area Plan for the Cedar Street area will be complete in the next 4-5 months. Immediate next steps include:

- More focused meetings with property owners on development interests,
- Development of a zoning and land use plan that fits the area more appropriately,
- Internal discussions with City departments on transportation, code enforcement, and policing problems.

In addition, the planning process will include another public meeting or series of meetings to confirm that the plan meets the public vision for the area.

## Area Description

This study describes existing conditions in the area around Cedar Street bounded on the west on Prescott, to the north on Battleground Avenue, to the east on Eugene Street and to the south on Friendly Avenue. The area, also known as the Bellemeade area, focuses on Cedar Street as the spine of the area and as the area most sensitive to development pressures.

With some exceptions, most residential structures face the north-south streets rather than side streets. The residential core of the neighborhood reflects a general historic pattern, with houses closer to the street on smaller streets and set back slightly on larger streets. Cedar Street appears slightly different from this pattern. Residential front setbacks vary from 7 to 15 feet on the west side of the street and from 30 to 35 feet on the east side. Front setbacks of residential structures on Spring Street range between 17 and 26 feet. A small storefront on Bellemeade Street, sits only four feet off of the street, while residences along Guilford Avenue measure 7 to 17 feet of the street.



**Map 1:** Cedar Street Study Area bounded by Eugene, Friendly, the rail line along Prescott and Battleground Avenue.

## General Demographics

Several statistics offer an impression of an area's stability: the age of the population, the rate of owner occupancy and the stability of property values. In the study area, total population is relatively sparse, with increasing density along Cedar Street and at the apartment complex on Friendly and Cedar Streets. Median ages in the study area vary from 35-45 years old on the western side of Cedar Street to 15-34 along Spring and Edgeworth Streets. Relative to adjacent neighborhoods, the population in the study area is comparatively young and reflects the neighborhood's high renter population and its proximity to the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and Greensboro College.

### Owner Occupancy

2004 real estate tax data suggests that only 17% of the owners in the Cedar Street study area are owner occupants. These people are loosely clustered within the central areas of the study area, particularly at the northern end of Cedar Street. According to the 1990 and 2000 Census, the presence of owner-occupants in the Cedar Street study area has remained relatively static, despite changes in the Westerwood and Fisher Park neighborhoods nearby. Census block groups representing the Westerwood neighborhood

have lost about 10% of their owner occupants, while Fisher Park has gained over 5% in owner occupancy. This data suggests that the current owner occupants are probably long time owners, and that the “turnover” from owner occupancy to rental that is happening in the Westerwood neighborhood has already occurred in the Cedar Street area.<sup>1</sup>

### House Value

According to 1990 and 2000 Census data, property values in the study area have gained modestly compared to the surrounding areas. Lake Daniel, Westerwood and the Cedar Street area gained \$7-11 million in property value (aggregated by census block group), while Fisher Park, Latham Park and Sunset Hills gained \$20-30 million in property value. Downtown and neighborhoods south and east of downtown gained the least value in this time period, about \$1-4 million. Recent tax values in the area suggest that of all residences, single-family owner occupants held a slightly higher tax value (\$70,000) than single-family rental (\$64,000).

### Zoning and Land Use

The Cedar Street study area contains nine different zoning districts (see table below), a third of which is zoned light industrial (29%). An additional quarter (26%) is zoned multi-family residential. Single-family residential comprises the least of all zoning categories. Of the 99 structures within residential zoning districts, 85 were originally constructed as detached housing (presumably single-family). Only 14 (14%) appear to be constructed as multi-family dwellings. About 34% of the detached dwellings now appear to be used for multi-family or office uses. It is not clear if these zoning designations followed the turnover of the neighborhood from owner occupancy and residential or whether the zoning categories themselves have chipped at the single-family owner occupancy core over time. Land use surveys of the area, which have been updated as part of this study, suggest that almost half (48%) of all land in the area is now used for commercial purposes. Another 18% is single-family, with the remaining major land uses as government and commercial. The following table illustrates the land uses within each zoning district:

| Zoning Districts                          | Square Footage | Percentage of Total Area |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|
| Light Industrial (LI)                     | 911,312        | 29%                      |
| Multi Family (RM-26)                      | 841,227        | 26%                      |
| General Office (GO-H)                     | 568,724        | 18%                      |
| Central Business (CB)                     | 467,821        | 15%                      |
| General Business (GB)                     | 271,937        | 9%                       |
| Light Industrial, Conditional Use (CU-LI) | 27,562         | 1%                       |
| General Office, Conditional Use (CU-GO-M) | 44,007         | 1%                       |
| General Business, Conditional Use (CU-GB) | 7,870          | >1%                      |
| Single Family (RS-7)                      | 10,478         | >1%                      |

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the 2000 Census data reflects conditions prior to the resurgence of the downtown housing market. Changes in owner occupancy, house values, etc. may not be fully represented.

## Historic Architecture and Neighborhood Ambience

The area appears on Sanborn maps as early as 1888. Two residences appear in the *Greensboro Architectural Record*: the T.R. Aiken House at 217 North Cedar Street (1896) and the Joseph F. Albright House at 229 North Cedar Street (late 1880s).<sup>2</sup> Grace United Methodist Church at 438 West Friendly Avenue also appears in the record, dating from 1925.<sup>3</sup> The residential historic core of Cedar Street remains largely intact, although most residences have been converted to multi-family structures. A survey of historic properties in the downtown area completed in 2002 included the Bellemeade area in its analysis. According to the survey, approximately 103 (74%) of the 140 structures in the area were considered “contributing” historic structures. Although there is no specific definition of contributing structures, the U.S. Department of the Interior states that in order for a structure to be



The study area includes historic single-family and multi-family structures.

considered “contributing” it must reflect one of the following four criteria:

1. Association with historic events or activities,
2. Association with important persons,
3. Distinctive design or physical characteristics, or
4. Potential to provide important information about prehistory or history.

Properties must possess historic significance and integrity. Historic significance depends on the property’s age (properties generally must be fifty years of age or older). Integrity must be evident in the “historic qualities including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.”<sup>4</sup>

Properties at the fringe have experienced the most visible losses of historic architecture, including the loss of the Ireland House to fire in 1996 and more recently the demolition of the Burlington Industries building for the construction of First Horizon Park. Since the 2002 survey, 7 structures have been demolished and another 6 will be demolished for the new construction of an office on Spring Street and townhouses on corner of Bellemeade and North Cedar Streets. The proposed demolitions suggest that the losses long experienced on the fringe of the study area are creeping inward toward North Cedar Street. Such new development not only removes Greensboro’s finite supply of historic structures but also undermines the integrity of the historic single-family residential “feel” that is among the area’s assets.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin Brown, *Greensboro: An Architectural Record* (1995), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> “How to Complete the National Register Form,” *National Register Bulletin*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service (1997), p.1.



## Transportation

Traffic movement through the Cedar Street area appears to contribute to its perception as a non-residential corridor, particularly along Spring and Edgeworth Streets. The map to the right illustrates existing major streets running through the study area. Based on post-2003 traffic counts provided by the Greensboro Department of Transportation, the most heavily traveled streets are Battleground, Eugene and Friendly, followed by Smith, Edgeworth and Spring Streets. Since 1990, both Spring and Edgeworth Streets have experienced a loss of traffic by as much as 13% over 13 years. Smith Street has seen a 15% increase in traffic flow over this same period and internal residential streets, such as Cedar and Bellemeade, have seen sharp increases in traffic flow, perhaps the result of the closing of Lindsay Street for First Horizon Park.



**Map 2:** Existing major streets in the Cedar Street study area. Most major streets are one way.

Based on public meetings, it appears that street patterns and traffic flow undermine the perception of the study area as a residential neighborhood. Some attendees repeatedly cited the speed at which traffic flowed on Spring and Edgeworth Streets and the widths of these roads as reasons why these parts of the neighborhood should not be considered residential, despite the prevalence of residential architecture on most blocks. Speed limits on Spring and Edgeworth Streets may be clearly marked, but most drivers appear to travel here much faster. This perception may be compounded by the lack of clearly marked crosswalks and pedestrian lights around the neighborhood. High-speed traffic and lack of pedestrian paths are even more obvious at the northern end of the study area between Battleground and Smith Streets. This area has literally become an island, and was hardly discussed at all by citizens at public meetings. While the internal housing of this area is still fairly intact, the area is not walkable to any other adjacent area, including the rest of North Cedar Street. Because the Cedar Street study area is at the crossroads of a number of major streets and an entrance to the highway, the dominance of cars throughout the neighborhood deters walking to nearby amenities, including downtown, and creates uncertainty for potential buyers who otherwise may consider renting or purchasing the many houses along these streets.

## Property Ownership and Conditions

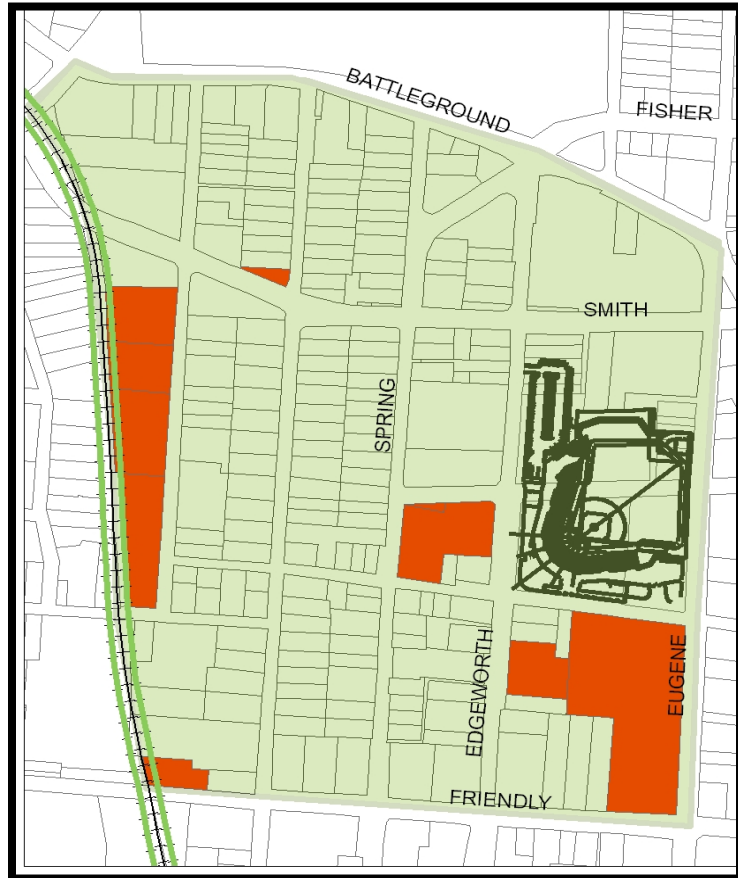
With an active downtown market, a number of investors have looked toward the Cedar Street area for business location or to own land to sell in the long term. Since 1992, the Cedar Street study area has seen seven rezoning proposals, five of which have been approved (see Map 5 and Table 2). A number of properties in the area have recently been renovated, particularly on Spring Street. Work is currently underway on several smaller homes scattered throughout the neighborhood, including areas abutting non-residential uses.

### Publicly Owned Land

Guilford County (including the Guilford County Board of Education) maintains one of the largest property holdings in the neighborhood with approximately 440,000 square feet, nearly 40% of which is located between the rail line and Prescott Street. This property remains largely vacant except for a building on the north end and a parking lot. In addition to the land on Prescott, Guilford County owns substantial parking lots along Eugene, Lindsay and Edgeworth Streets. These lots represent almost 273,000 square feet and about 62% of Guilford County's land in the area.

The City of Greensboro owns less than 28,000 square feet in the neighborhood, most of which is vacant except for a

small parking lot on Lindsay Street. Unlike County properties, the City properties do not represent development opportunities but rather a small scatter of splintered properties.



**Map 3:** Darker colors indicate publicly owned properties. The rail line along the western side of the study area indicates the future greenway.

### Major Private Property Owners

A number of businesses and individuals own significant property in the Cedar Street area, both in terms of square footage and property value. These properties are utilized for a variety of land uses. Throughout the study area, a few property owners own several contiguous parcels of land—half blocks in some cases. These parcels create the greatest vulnerability to inappropriate development and loss of historic architecture.

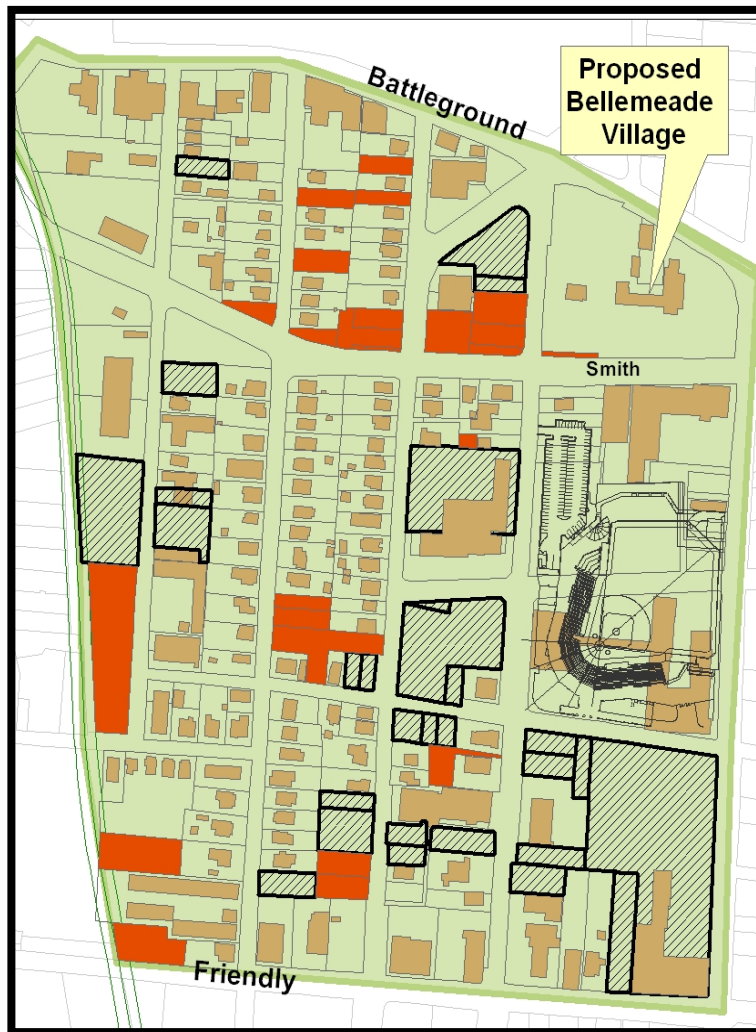
### Single Family Homeowners

Most of the residential properties in the area are rentals. About 17% of all residences are owner occupied. These properties generally appear toward the center of the neighborhood, but are not necessarily contiguous. The pattern of rental versus owner occupants along the Cedar Street corridor creates a high level of instability. For example, on the central block of Cedar Street, only 5 structures out of 22 are owner occupied.

### Vacant Land and Parking Lots

26 neighborhood properties are used primarily for surface parking, totaling 320,000 square feet or about 7.5 acres (approximately 2,000 parking spaces). Vacant land covers an additional 180,000 square feet or slightly over 4 acres. Many of these parcels are located on main thoroughfares, such as Eugene and Edgeworth Streets, or are on the border with downtown. Map 4 shows vacant lots and surface parking.

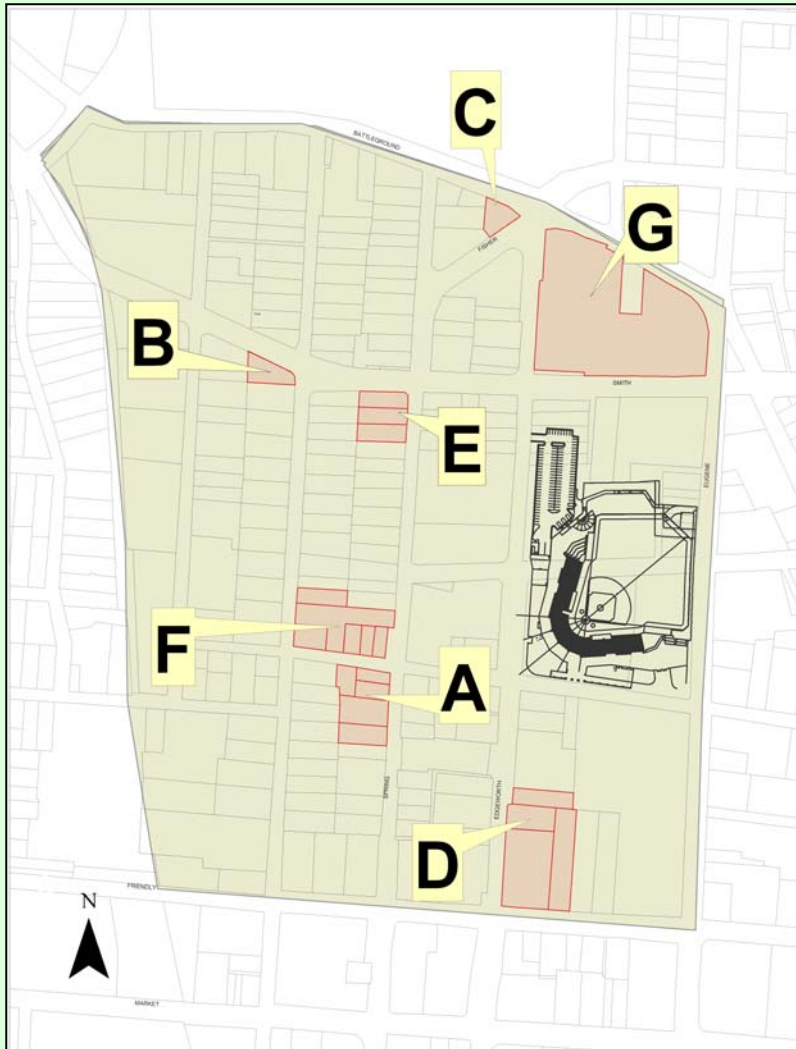
The nearest public parking deck, the Bellemeade deck, is about 900 feet from Eugene Street and is less than a half-mile from the center of the neighborhood. As the map indicates, the dispersion of vacant lots and parking lots is fairly even throughout the neighborhood. The level of vacant lots suggests that property owners are holding back development in anticipation of the downtown market “spreading” toward Cedar Street—or for City intervention.



**Map 4:** Vacant land and major parking lots in the study

market “spreading” toward Cedar Street—or for City intervention.

## Recent and Proposed Rezonings in the Cedar Street Study Area



**Map 5:** Recent rezoning proposals and approvals are not clustered in any particular location.

**Table 2:** Rezoning Requests since 1993. Two are pending.

| MAP Reference | Date of Rezoning Application | Change   | Status   |
|---------------|------------------------------|--|----------|
| A             | February 2002                | Change parcel on Bellemeade from RM-26 (Multi-family) to CU-CO-M (Office)          | Approved |
| B             | April 2002                   | Change parcel on Smith Street from LI (Industrial) to RM-26 (Multi-family)         | Approved |
| C             | October 2002                 | Change parcel on Battleground Avenue from LI (Industrial) to GB (General Business) | Approved |
| D             | June 2004                    | Change parcel on Friendly from GO-H (General Office) to CB (Central Business)      | Approved |
| E             | April 2005                   | Change from RM-26 (Multi-family) to CD-GO-M (Office)                               | Approved |
| F             | June 2005                    | Change parcel on Bellemeade from RM-26 and CD-GO-M to CD-PDI                       | Pending  |
| G             | June 2005                    | Change parcel on Smith Street from GB (General Business) to CB (Central Business)  | Pending  |



## Stakeholder Input

Two public meetings were held on Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, one at 11:30 a.m. and the other at 6:00 p.m. at the Weir-Jordan House at 223 North Edgeworth Street. About 60 citizens attended, including Cedar Street area residents, nearby neighborhood residents, property owners and investors. Attendees were asked three questions: What is good about Cedar Street? What is not so good about Cedar Street? What should Cedar Street look like in 5 years? Answers to these questions reflected the diversity of the participants. However, several common themes emerged:

1. Residents in the neighborhood felt a strong sense of community in the area; outsiders did not.
2. Current zoning designations are not seen as helping the neighborhood and rezoning decisions seem ad hoc.
3. Although most people feel that the neighborhood has tremendous potential as a residential/commercial area, the lack of certainty regarding future uses and general neighborhood stability keep some investors from spending money improving properties.

When discussing what they liked most about the Cedar Street area, citizens noted the neighborhood's concentration of intact and diverse historic houses close to downtown and the baseball stadium and connected by streets and sidewalks. They appreciate the area's relative affordability and the diversity of residents, but also see the potential for development in vacant lots and the North State Chevrolet property.

| Challenges to the Neighborhood                             | Perceived Needs  | The Area in 5 or 10 Years                                    |
|--|--|--|
| Dilapidated/under-maintained properties                    | A moratorium on rezonings until a plan is in place                 | An intact, improved neighborhood                             |
| Crime and the perception that the neighborhood is not safe | A protective overlay (design guidelines, historic district status) | Improved housing with diversity and affordability maintained |
| Lack of stability preventing investment in houses          | Low cost loans for renovation                                      | More active relationship with other neighborhoods            |
| Bulldozing of properties                                   | Intervention to prevent neighborhood decline                       | Compatible, mixed-use infill                                 |
| Some impacts from baseball stadium (noise, parking)        |  | Improved transportation network (pedestrian, bike and car)   |
| No park or public space                                    |  | More visual cohesion   |
| No automated trash pick-up                                 |  |  |
| Traffic issues in certain locations                        |  |  |

**Table 3:** Summary of Public Meeting attendees' responses.



## Strategic Area Planning Process

This report demonstrates that the Cedar Street area has a wealth of existing historical assets as well as excellent development potential. Further, the public meetings and interviews revealed a discernable sentiment to work towards retaining characteristics of the area that speak to its history and identity. The challenge is to encourage development and reinvestment that complements both the existing unique neighborhood while further enhancing downtown revitalization efforts. A strategic area plan adopted by City Council is a critical tool to help meet this challenge by creating a policy framework for appropriate development.

The next phase will involve additional public sessions that focus on specific strategies the City can take to stabilize and enhance the study area. This will also include individual meetings with property owners to determine development intent. Additional actions may include:

- Support for the development of a neighborhood “identity” and organization for the area;
- A traffic study to look at options for traffic calming and creating greater pedestrian accessibility along the major thoroughfares through the area;
- Pursuit of design standards for property owners interested in developing properties into mixed use, commercial and/or multi-family structures along the fringes of the study area;
- Development studies of the publicly-owned vacant land in the neighborhood;
- Exploration of elective inclusion in a National or Local Historic District for property owners at the core of the neighborhood along Cedar Street;
- Study of zoning guidelines that preserve the historic character of the neighborhood (if not the structures);
- Pursuit of grant funding and other resources to improve neighborhood walkability;
- Coordination with UNCG, the Police, Environmental Services, Local Ordinance and Zoning Enforcement for increased control over garbage collection, student housing and parties, lax attention by property owners, etc.

## Next Steps

The planning process as described above will continue over the next few month with periodic updates being provided to City Council and the public. In the interim, the area will continue to be the subject of development pressures that may result in rezoning requests. Until a plan is completed and adopted it is recommended that the Zoning Commission and City Council consider the following issues that are consistent with the findings of this report:

1. Has the applicant met with the neighborhood concerning the request to get their input?
2. Does the request involve the demolition of existing structures? If so, what is being lost and are there viable alternatives?
3. Is the request compatible with the physical character (scale, materials, setbacks, style etc.) of the neighborhood?